

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Rally in Madison, Wisconsin
September 28, 2010

The President. Hello, Wisconsin! Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you, everybody. I am—I don't know about you, but I'm fired up.

Audience member. Ready to go!

The President. And ready to go.

A couple of people I want to acknowledge. First of all, a great mayor, somebody who's fighting for working families each and every day, Tom Barrett. Please give him a big round of applause.

Somebody who is one of the consciences of the Senate, who's always independent, doesn't always agree with me, but always agrees with the people of his State and looking out for them, Senator Russ Feingold; one of the most courageous Members of Congress that we have, Tammy Baldwin in the house.

I want to thank Madison mayor, Dave Cieslewicz—doing a great job. University of Wisconsin System President Kevin Reilly is here; University of Wisconsin—Madison Chancellor Biddy Martin is in the house.

And I want to thank our terrific musical guests, Ben Harper, The National, and Mama Digdown's Brass Band.

It is good to be back in the State of Wisconsin. I was mentioning that when I first moved to Chicago—[*applause*—I know we've got some Chicago folks in the house—[*applause*—you know, every once in a while, I had some friends who were going to school up here, and I'd drive up to Madison. And I had some fun times up here in Madison. I can't give you all the details—[*laughter*—but I have good memories here.

And may I say that you Badgers are looking pretty good this year. You delivered quite a beating on Saturday. Almost wasn't fair. [*Laughter*]

Now, I'm not going to say a word about the Bears and the Packers. I'm not going to say anything about it. My lips are sealed. I'm not going to say a word about it. Why spoil this great mood? [*Laughter*] Because it's just nice to see that you're as fired up today as you were on Saturday. [*Laughter*] So don't think about Sunday. [*Laughter*]

I need you, though, fired up, Badgers. I need you fired up. We need you to stay fired up because there is an election on November 2d that's going to say a lot about the future, your future and the future of our country.

Two years ago, you defied the conventional wisdom in Washington. The message out there was, "No, you can't." No, you can't overcome the cynicism of our politics. No, you can't overcome the power of special interests in Washington. No, you can't make real progress on the big challenges of our time. No, you can't elect a skinny guy with a funny name, Barack Hussein Obama. They said, no, you can't. But what did you say, Wisconsin?

Audience members. Yes we can!

The President. You proved that the power of everyday people going door to door, neighbor to neighbor, friend to friend, was stronger than the forces of the status quo. It made more difference than PAC money. It made more difference than all the TV advertising. You tapped into something that this country hadn't seen in a very long time. You did that.

And every single one of you is a shareholder in that mission of rebuilding our country and reclaiming our future. And I'm back here today because on November 2d, we face another test. And the stakes could not be higher.

Think about it. When I arrived in Washington 20 months ago, my hope and my expectation was that we could pull together, all of us as Americans—Democrats and Republicans and Independents—to confront the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. I hoped and expected that we could get beyond some of the old political divides between Democrats and Republicans, blue States and red States, that had prevented us from making progress for so long, because although we are proud to be Democrats, we are prouder to be Americans.

And this country was confronting a crisis. Instead, what we found when we arrived in Washington was the rawest kind of politics. What we confronted was an opposition party that was still stuck on the same failed policies of the past, whose leaders in Congress were determined from the start to let us deal with the mess that they had done so much to create.

Because their calculation was as simple as it was cynical. They knew that it was going to take a long time to solve the economic challenges we face. They saw the data. They were talking to the economists. They realized that Obama was walking in and we had just lost 4 million jobs in the 6 months before I was sworn in; 750,000 jobs the month I was sworn in; 600,000 jobs the month after that; 600,000 jobs that month after that. So before our economic policies could even be put into place, we'd already lost most of the 8 million jobs we would lose.

And they knew that people would be frustrated. And they figured, if we just sit on the sidelines and just say no and just throw bombs and let Obama and the Democrats deal with everything, they figured they might be able to prosper at the polls.

And that's what they've done for the last 20 months. They have said no to just about every idea and policy I've proposed, even ideas that historically, traditionally, they agreed with. So now the pundits are saying that the base of the Republican Party is mobilized. The prediction among the pundits is this is going to be a bloodletting for Democrats. That's what they're saying in Washington.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. And what they're saying is—and the basis of their prediction is that all of you who worked so hard in 2008 aren't going to be as energized, aren't going to be as engaged. They say there is an enthusiasm gap and that the same Republicans and the same policies that left our economy in a shambles and the middle class struggling might ride right back into power.

Audience members. No!

The President. Now, that's what they're saying. I'm not making this up. You guys read the papers. You guys are watching the television. They're basically saying that you're apathetic, you're disappointed, you're, "Oh, well, we're not sure that we're going to turn out."

Wisconsin, we can't let that happen. We cannot sit this one out. We can't let this country fall backwards because the rest of us didn't care enough to fight. The stakes are too high for our country and for your future, and I am going to get out there and fight as hard as I can—and I know you are too—to make sure we keep moving forward.

The other side would have you believe this election is a referendum on me or a referendum on the economy, a referendum on anything except them. But make no mistake: This election is a choice. And the choice could not be clearer.

Understand, for the last decade, the Republicans in Washington subscribed to a very simple philosophy—and I want to be clear, this is the Republican leadership in Washington. A whole bunch of Republicans out all across America are feeling pretty disaffected too by what they saw when the Republicans were in charge. But their basic theory of the Republican leadership was, you cut taxes, mostly for millionaires and billionaires.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. You cut regulations for special interests, whether it's the banks or the oil companies or health insurance companies. Let them write their own rules. You cut back on investments in education and clean energy and research and technology.

So basically, the idea was if you just put blind faith in the market, if we let corporations play by their own rules, if we leave everybody else to fend for themselves, then America would automatically grow and prosper.

But that philosophy failed. Because in the period when they were in power—understand this, from 2001 to 2009, job growth was slower than it had been in any decade since World War II. Between 2001 and 2009, middle class incomes fell by 5 percent. The cost of everything from health care to college tuition just kept going up. And a free-for-all on Wall Street led to the very crisis that right now we're digging ourselves out of.

So it's not like we don't have a controlled experiment here. We have—they were in charge. We saw what happened. So I've got—I've had two main jobs since becoming President: to rescue the economy from this crisis, to clean up after their mess, and to rebuild our economy stronger than it was before. That's been my job.

And over the last 20 months, we've made progress on both these fronts. We're no longer facing the possibility of a second depression, and I have to say, Wisconsin, that was a very real possibility when I was sworn in. We had about 6 months where the economy was teetering on the edge, and we could have plunged into a second depression.

Now the economy is growing again. Now the private sector has created jobs for the last 8 months in a row. There are about 3 million Americans who wouldn't be working today if not for the economic plan that we put into place. Those are facts.

By the way, I emphasize those are facts because the other side isn't always interested in facts.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. To rebuild this economy on a stronger foundation, we passed Wall Street reform to make sure that a crisis like this never happens again, so that these reforms are going to end the era of taxpayer-funded bailouts forever, reforms that will stop mortgage lenders from taking advantage of homeowners, reforms that'll stop credit card companies from hitting you with hidden fees or jacking up your rates without any reason.

But we didn't stop there. We started investing again in American research and American technology and homegrown American clean energy because I don't want solar panels and wind turbines and electric cars of the future built in Europe or Asia. I want them built right here in the United States of America with American workers.

To help middle class families get ahead, we passed a tax cut for 95 percent of working families. I want to repeat that: We cut taxes for 95 percent of working families, because if you were listening to the other side, you'd think we raised taxes.

But again, we deal in facts. And the fact is, we cut taxes for 95 percent of working families. We passed 16 different tax cuts for America's small-business owners, who create the majority of jobs in this country. We passed health care reform that will stop insurance companies from denying you coverage or dropping your coverage because you're sick.

And by the way, Madison, let me just see a show of hands, how many people are under the age of 26 in this crowd? Every single one of you, when you get out of college, if you have not found a job that offers you health care, you're going to be able to stay on your parents' health care until you're 26 years old, so you don't end up taking the risk of getting sick and being bankrupt.

We finally fixed the student loan system so that tens of billions of dollars—tens of billions of dollars of taxpayer subsidies that were going to big banks—they were acting as middlemen, and the student loan programs were going through these financial intermediaries. They were taking billions of dollars of profits. We said, well, let's cut out the middleman. We'll give the loans directly to students and that means million more students are going to be able to take advantage of grants and student loans.

And by the way, we also kept a promise I made on the day that I announced my candidacy. We have removed combat troops from Iraq, and we have ended our combat mission in Iraq.

Now, that's just some of what we've done. I haven't even mentioned the fact that we signed into law laws making sure that we enforce equal pay for equal work, because I think my daughters should be treated just like somebody else's sons. I haven't mentioned the fact that we had the largest expansion of national service so that young people can tap into their idealism and start working here in this country and around the world to make people's lives better. I haven't talked about the fact that we made sure that tobacco companies can't market their products to children.

We have made progress over the last 20 months. And that is the progress that you worked so hard for in 2008. Now, we didn't get everything done. Sometimes people say, "Well, you know, this item is not done and that item, I"—well, I've only been here 2 years, guys. [Laughter] If you look at the checklist, we've already covered about 70 percent, so I figured I needed to have something to do for the next couple of years.

And look, here's the fact. Here's the fact, is that we're not where we need to be, not even close. The hole that we're climbing out of is a deep one. People, I want you to understand the magnitude of what we've gone through. This is deeper than the last three recessions combined. Most of the jobs we lost took place before any of our economic policies had a chance to take effect. And on top of that, the middle class had been struggling for more than a decade and jobs had been getting shipped overseas and millions of families were still treading water. Millions are still barely able to make their bills or make the mortgage. I hear their stories every day. I read them in just heartbreaking letters that I receive each night.

So I understand that people are frustrated. I understand people are impatient with the pace of change. Of course they are. Look, I'm impatient, but I also know this: Now is not the time to lose heart; now is not the time to give up. We do not quit. And we cannot forget that this Nation has been through far worse and we have come out stronger, from war to depression to the great struggle for equal rights and civil rights. We do not quit.

In every instance, progress took time. In every instance, progress took sacrifice. Progress took faith. You know, the slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs, they weren't sure when slavery would end, but they understood it was going to end. When women were out there marching for the right to vote, they weren't sure when it was going to happen, but they kept on going. When workers were organizing for the right to organize and were being intimidated, they weren't sure when change was going to come, but they knew it was going to come. And I am telling you, Wisconsin, we are bringing about change, and progress is going to come, but you've got to stick with me. You can't lose heart.

Change is going to come. Change is going to come for this generation if we work for it, if we fight for it, if we believe in it. The biggest mistake we could make right now is to let disappointment or frustration lead to apathy and indifference. That is how the other side wins. And I want everybody to be clear, make no mistake: If the other side does win, they will spend the next 2 years fighting for the very same policies that led to this recession in the first place, the same policies that left the middle class behind for more than a decade, the same policies that we fought so hard for to change in 2008.

Just look at the agenda the other leaders—that the leaders of the other party unveiled last week. They call this "Pledge to America." That's what they called it. And in case you're wondering how serious they are about changing Washington, this pledge was actually written with the help of a former lobbyist for AIG and a former lobbyist for Exxon-Mobil.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. You can't make this stuff up. *[Laughter]* This is the truth.

Now, the centerpiece of their pledge, their central economic idea—this is it, this is their main idea for growing the economy and dealing with the 8 million jobs that were lost as a consequence of their earlier policies—their main idea is a \$700 billion tax cut for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans, right?

Audience members. Boo!

The President. So 98 percent of Americans would never see a dime of this \$700 billion. Now, keep in mind, we don't have \$700 billion. *[Laughter]* So we'd have to borrow it. And the party that lectures us on fiscal responsibility wants to borrow another \$700 billion to give a tax cut worth an average of \$100,000 to every millionaire and billionaire in America.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. And when you ask them, well, where do they plan to find the \$700 billion, where is this money? Is it laying around? You didn't tell us about this. Where is it? *[Laughter]* They don't have an answer. But to pay for just a tiny fraction of this tax cut, they want to cut education by 20 percent.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. They want to eliminate 200,000 children from an early childhood education program like Head Start.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. They want to cut financial aid for 8 million college students, including some of the people who are out here today.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. This for a tax cut for folks who don't need it and weren't even asking for it. At a time when the education of a country's citizens is the biggest predictor of its economic success, they think it's more important to give another tax break to people who made the Forbes 400 list. Now, I have to ask my Republican friends a question here: Do you think that China is cutting back on education?

Audience members. No!

The President. Do you think that South Korea is making it harder for their citizens to get a college education?

Audience members. No!

The President. These countries aren't playing for second place. And let me tell you something, the United States of America doesn't play for second place, either. We play for first place, Wisconsin. We play for first place.

This is an economic issue of our generation. And I will not allow politicians in Washington to sacrifice your future on another round of tax cuts that aren't paid for, that we don't need, and you can't afford. And that's the choice in this election. That's why you need to be involved. Your future is at stake here.

Look, we have a different idea about what the next 2 years should look like. And it's an idea rooted in our belief about how this country was built. We know that government doesn't have all the answers to our problems. We don't believe that government's main role is to create jobs or prosperity.

One of the things that the other side has been able to do is to hoodwink a whole bunch of folks all across the country, after we had to take emergency measures to clean up their mess, to say, look, he's for big government. The steps we took to make sure that the auto industry didn't go down the tubes or the financial system didn't go down the tubes was because they weren't minding the store when they were in charge.

It's not because I came in with a big government agenda. I believe government should be lean and efficient. And that's why I've proposed a 3-year spending freeze. That's why I set up a bipartisan fiscal commission to deal with our deficit. But in the words of the first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, I also believe that government should do for the people what they can't do better for themselves. I believe in a country that rewards hard work and responsibility, a country where we look after one another, a country where I say, I'm my brother's keeper, I'm my sister's keeper.

I believe in an America that gave my grandfather the chance to go to college because of the GI bill. I believe in an America that gave my grandparents the chance to buy a home because of the Federal Housing Authority. I believe in an America that gave their children and grandchildren the chance to fulfill our dreams thanks to scholarships and student loans like some of you are on. That's the America I know. That's the choice in this election.

Instead of \$700 billion tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, we want to make permanent the tax cuts for middle class Americans. You deserve a break. Instead of cutting education and student aid, we want to make permanent our new college tax credit that's worth \$10,000 of tuition relief for each young person going to 4 years of college. We want to make clear that in good times and in bad times, no young American should have to sacrifice the dream of a college education just because they can't afford it. That's what we believe. That's the choice in this election.

If we let the other side take control of Congress, they'll spend the next 2 years fighting to preserve tax breaks for companies that create jobs and profits overseas, billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies that we lose each year. Over the last 20 months, we've had—we've taken the step of closing a lot of these tax loopholes. And over the next 2 years, we're going to fight to give tax breaks to companies that are actually creating jobs here in the United States of America: to small businesses; to clean energy companies; to American manufacturers; to entrepreneurs who are researching and investing and innovating right here in the United States. That's who we want to help. And that's the choice in this election.

If the other side takes back Congress, they've promised to give back power to the same special interests we've been fighting for the last 20 months. In every State, including right here in Wisconsin, you've got millions of dollars pouring in from special interests. I refuse to let that happen. I refuse to go back to the days when insurance companies could deny you coverage or drop your coverage just because you're sick.

Just the other day, I was talking to a woman who did not have health insurance, even though she was working at a school. Contracted cancer, was not sure whether she was going to have to use the entire college fund that she had saved for her kids in order to get treatment. Fortunately, because of the health reform we signed, she now has coverage. But they would want to roll it back. They don't think that makes sense.

I refuse to go back to the days when credit card companies can jack up your rates without reason. I refuse to go back to the days where taxpayer-funded Wall Street bailouts end up being necessary. We can't allow the special interests to take the reins again. We've got to keep on fighting. There's too much at stake right now.

So Madison, it comes down to this. And I'm not just talking to Madison, by the way, because there are 200 campuses across the country who are plugged in through web cams and house parties, so I'm speaking to everybody out there. *[Laughter]* Many of the folks in the other party who are running today are the exact same people who spent the last decade driving our economy into the ditch.

So me and Russ Feingold and Tammy Baldwin, we all went down into the ditch. And we put on our boots, and it was muddy down there and dirty and dusty, and we were sweating, and we were pushing the car out of the ditch. And every so often, we'd look up and see the Republicans standing there. They're just standing there, sipping on a Slurpee—*[laughter]*—and waving at us. And we'd say, "Well, come on down and help." They'd say, "No, no, no, but you should push harder. You're not pushing the right way."

But we understood we had to get the car out of the ditch, so we're pushing and we're pushing. Finally—finally, we get it up on level ground. Finally, we get it up on level ground. And look, let's face it: It's a little dented and a little busted, and it needs a tuneup—*[laughter]*—and the fenders all need to be hammered out a little bit, new paint job. But we're finally on level ground, we're moving forward. Suddenly we get a tap on the shoulder, and we

look behind us and who is it? It's the Republicans. And they're asking for the keys back. And we've got to tell them, you can't have the keys back. You don't know how to drive. You don't know how to drive. You don't know how to drive. You can't have them back.

I mean, I hope everybody has noticed, when you want to go forward in your car, what do you do? You put it in "D." When you want to go backwards, you put it in "R." Don't go back into the ditch. That's not a coincidence. That's not a coincidence, people.

So ultimately, whether they get the keys back is up to you. Look, there is no question the other side is excited. They have been pumped up to think that Obama is a socialist, and he's this and he is that, and he's for big government, and he's responsible for all the—look, they have been fed a lot of information.

And there's some well-meaning people out there who are understandably scared of debt and deficits, and they see what's going on. They see jobs being shipped overseas, and they're not sure what's happening. And we are in charge. And they're saying, "Well, why hasn't change happened faster?"

And so you can persuade them maybe to give the Republicans the keys back if they're not hearing the other side of the argument. So a lot of them are fired up. And thanks to a recent Supreme Court decision, they are being helped along this year, as I said, by special interest groups that are allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money on attack ads. They don't even have to disclose who's behind the ads. You've all seen the ads. Every one of these groups is run by Republican operatives. Every single one of them—even though they're posing as nonprofit groups with names like Americans for Prosperity or the Committee for Truth in Politics or Americans for Apple Pie. *[Laughter]* I mean, I made that last one up, but—*[laughter]*—but this is why—look, this is why we've got to work even harder in this election. This is why we've got to fight their millions of dollars with millions of our voices, voices who are ready to finish what we started in 2008.

Because if everybody who fought for change in 2008 shows up to vote in 2010, we will win. We will win. The polls say the same thing: We will win.

So what the other side—you know what the other side is counting on this time around? They're counting on you staying home. They're counting on your silence. They're counting on amnesia. *[Laughter]* They're betting on your apathy, especially because a lot of you are young folks.

So, Madison, you've got to prove them wrong. Let's show Washington one more time, change doesn't come from the top. It doesn't come from millions of dollars of special interest-funded attack ads. Change happens from the bottom up. Change happens because of you. Change happens because of you. Change happens because of you.

I know times are tough right now. I know times are tough. I know a lot of folks are anxious about the future. And I know that during the campaign, especially after we had already started winning, the feeling was, well, this is just exciting. You got those nice hope posters, and then there was the Inauguration, and Beyonce singing—*[laughter]*—and Bono.

And I know sometimes it feels a long way from the hope and excitement that we felt on election day or the day of the Inauguration. But I've got to say, we always knew this was going to take time. We always knew this was going to be hard. I said it was going to be hard, remember?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. I said I was going to tell you some things you didn't want to hear. I said that we were going to have to make some difficult choices. I said not everybody was going to be happy with every single decision I made.

You did not elect me to do what was easy. You didn't just elect me to read the polls and figure out how to keep myself in office. Whenever you read the media in Washington, all they're concerned about is, boy, his polls numbers are down, so that must mean that he didn't do the right thing. Just because your poll numbers are down, that's how everything is measured.

But you didn't elect me to look at the polls. You elected me to do what was right. You elected me to do what was right. That was change you could believe in, that I was going to do what was right, not what was expedient, not what was convenient.

And you got involved. What was different about this campaign was because you believed this was the moment to solve the challenges that the country had ignored for far too long.

That involvement can't end with the vote that you cast in 2008. That election was not just about putting me in the White House. It was about building a movement for change that went beyond any one campaign or any one candidate. It was about remembering that in the United States of America, our destiny is not written for us, it is written by us. That is the blessing of this country. The power to shape our future lies in our hands, but only if we're willing to keep working for it and fighting for it and keep believing that change is possible.

So that's what's being tested right now. That's what's being tested. We are being tested here. The question is, are we going to have the courage to keep moving forward even in the face of difficulty, even in the face of uncertainty? This election is not about what we've done; it's about the work we have left to do. It's what—it's about what you want this country to look like over the next 2 years. It's about your future.

So, Madison, get out there and shape it. Get out there and fight for it. I need your help, Madison. We need you to commit to vote. We need you to pledge to vote. We need you to knock on doors. We need you to talk to neighbors. We need you to make phone calls. We need you to bring energy and passion and commitment. Because if we do, if you're willing to step up to the plate and realize that change is not a spectator sport, we will not just win this election, we are going to restore our economy, we are going to rebuild the middle class, we will reclaim the American Dream for this generation.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:07 p.m. in the Kohl Center at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. In his remarks, he referred to former lobbyist Brian Wild; and entertainers Beyonce G. Knowles and Paul D. "Bono" Hewson.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee rally in Madison, WI.

Locations: Madison, WI.

Names: Baldwin, Tammy; Barrett, Thomas M.; Cieslewicz, David J.; Feingold, Russell D.; Harper, Benjamin C.; Hewson, Paul D. "Bono"; Knowles, Beyonce G.; Martin, Carolyn A. "Biddy"; Reilly, Kevin P.; Wild, Brian.

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businesses :: Promotion efforts; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : Postsecondary education :: Tax credits, expansion; Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act; Elections : 2010 congressional elections; Elections : Campaign finance laws; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Outsourcing to foreign countries; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009; Health and medical care : Affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Young adults, insurance coverage as dependents, age limit extension; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax Code :: Reform; Taxation : Tax cuts, budgetary effects; Taxation : Tax relief; Wisconsin : Democratic Party event; Wisconsin : President's visits.

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